

Horseback Riding Should Be Considered Athletic Sport

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Over 1,200 pounds of muscle and ferocity races down a track, leaps over jumps, and slices around barrels at top speed. This is the horse, a magnificent animal who can only be controlled by the ones who have enough faith in the animal to ride it. An equestrian is the only one with enough courage to attempt taming this wild animal. They say it's not a sport, that it's easy. Some say you just 'sit there.' They don't know what it takes to be an equestrian.

Whether or not horseback riding is a sport has been a controversial topic among people who ride horses and people who don't. First, let's look at the statement; 'You just sit there.'

This statement is incorrect for various reasons.

A recent study by healthstatus.com shows that a person who weighs 150 pounds on a

horse at a walk burns 171 calories an hour, which is equivalent to walking 2 miles per hour on foot - not to mention the same person would burn 441 calories each hour at the trot, and 549 calories at the gallop.

Still think riding isn't a sport? What about the dangers of horseback riding? Horses are born as wild animals, so they have minds of their own. Imagine going 40km/h aboard a 5-foot animal when your only form of control is the trust between that animal and yourself.

In football, when you fall, you're only falling the length of your own body. When riding a horse, you can fall from 5 feet in the air or more. Not only are you falling, but nine times out of 10, the horse has no intention of stopping - and could trample you or worse.

In the Olympics, horses and rid-

ers are shown jumping 5 foot and higher jumps. Riders don't know whether the horse will jump perfectly or if it will all go wrong. If the horse doesn't jump precisely enough, there's a good chance the horse will end up on top of you.

Newspapers in several parts of the world fail to include horseback riding in their sports pages because they simply don't understand the sport. In Saugerties, NY a rider by the name of Rebecca Weissbard was pronounced dead after being dismounted off her horse during the HITS competition. This is one of the largest competitions and this year was the only year this New York newspaper chose to write a story on it. The fact is that too often a

horse event is covered only when someone dies.

"A sport is something requiring physical energy and practice, both of which are important in any

discipline," says Adeline Yednock, intermediate three-day eventer.

Like many other sports, horse riding requires teamwork. The difference however, is that you are forced to find alternate ways of communication with your teammate. The horse does not speak as you do, so you must use your actions and tone to communicate. Riders who have mastered this skill can get a horse to listen to them with only their seat, leg, and hand. It's quite amazing.

"It's one of the only team sports where your teammate doesn't know your language," said Emily Jones, fellow equestrian.

To have an animal three times your size put its complete trust in you is an amazing thing. The bond between horse and rider is indescribable. Everyone just needs to ride a horse to know what it takes.

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